United Nations E/CN.6/2012/NGO/55

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
2 December 2011

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by St. Joan's International Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-62003 (E) 271211

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Statement

Our organization is predominantly but not exclusively Catholic. We have felt, since our founding 100 years ago, a disappointment that some types of the mistreatment and suffering of women are caused by our Church. Because the Catholic Church is so large and influential, this oppression has spread beyond Catholicism and harms women of many faiths worldwide.

The Church is ruled by males who determine church doctrine, church policies, interpretation of scripture, history and traditions. Women's voices and perceptions are not heard. Male-only images of God serve to empower and entitle human men and to disempower and devalue needs expressed by women. These needs include the need to raise children in a gentle, loving environment where their welfare and well-being are nurtured, but they have taken a backseat to male priorities and masculine interpretations of reality. War, violence and grasping for power often have their roots in childhood trauma. Without the implementation of women's values, these traumas will continue to be passed on from generation to generation.

For Catholic women, the reality is that they are repressed by teachings that determine their adult fate. These teachings are favourable to the comfort and development of men, but subordinate women's less self-centred needs and voices. This is true in education, employment, politics, family life and many other areas. Even women's needs for physical safety and respect within the family are not supported by the teachings or active policies of most religious leaders.

We belong to a Church which restricts leadership to men chosen for their agreement with the hierarchy and which silences educated and responsible diversity of opinion in the pulpit, in the universities and in the media — for laymen and even more so for women. We work to make women's voices heard within and also outside of the Roman Catholic Church. In doing so we feel that the values we support are our truly religious values, and not only ours but also those of women of all religions worldwide.